



Chairman Hogan and members of the interim Human Services Committee. I am Cindy Miller, Executive Director of FirstLink and with me is David Vining, Director of Program Development at FirstLink. We are here today to inform you about FirstLink's current services and ask you to continue our funding for the upcoming biennium with the purpose of supporting and maintaining FirstLink's 2-1-1 Helpline and National Suicide Prevention lifeline statewide.

FirstLink's helpline was incorporated in 1971 and continues to ensure people have access to 24 hour information and referral about nonprofit human service and emergency resources as well as listening and support. The Public Service Commissioners designated FirstLink the 2-1-1 provider for the entire state of North Dakota in 2010. (Previously we answered 2-1-1 calls for Cass County only.) **In 2015, FirstLink answered one call every ten minutes from someone in need.** Our call volume continues to set record numbers year after year. In 2015, FirstLink answered 53,748 phone calls and surpassed our 1,000,000th phone call since opening in 1970. We see the extraordinary need for our services every single day. Whether you have an alcohol or drug addiction you want resources for, you are facing a disaster in your community, you are feeling suicidal, you need to register your drug prescription information with the North Dakota Insurance Department, you need military, veteran and family support, or you need basic services like food and shelter, FirstLink is here to help.

This is why we are here today! This service is our mission and passion and has been for over 45 years. FirstLink is a highly qualified 2-1-1 call center. With certifications from American Association of Suicidology (AAS), Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), and all staff are trained in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). 94% of the United States can dial 2-1-1 and be connected with a local call center. This is a lifelong resource, that we are blessed to have in North Dakota.

FirstLink's helplines benefit everyone. Anyone can face a financial or mental health struggle in their life. We can all have concerns at any time – about losing our homes, jobs, retirement packages, freedom, and natural disasters. However, since FirstLink's 2-1-1 Helpline is here 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to provide resources and referrals to callers, we have the ability to make getting help much easier.

When it comes to disaster services, FirstLink has contracts with local cities and counties to assist them. FirstLink 2-1-1 Helpline can assist callers who have experienced a disaster and are in need of resources and referrals to help them get through such difficult times. Year round, FirstLink understands that when basic needs are met, people are better able to cope and lead a healthy life.

Who needs FirstLink?

- All people... anytime, anywhere in North Dakota.
- People seeking information and community resources.
- People who are experiencing financial hardship.
- People with mental health concerns about themselves or someone they care about.
- People from rural communities where fewer resources may be available.
- People from large communities where many resources may be available.

FirstLink's Funding Sources:

Department	Type of funding	Amount	completed	Continue ?	% funding
SAMHSA	Follow up call program	\$30,000.00	06/31/16	?	4%
DHS	211 services	\$275,000.00	06/31/17	Y	31%
ND Ins. Dept.	SHIC comparisons	\$8,500.00	yearly	Y	1%
NDDDES	Special needs registry	\$30,000.00		?	4%
Military	211 support	\$6,000.00	yearly	?	1%
United Ways	211 support	\$185,000.00	yearly	?	21%
Contracts	answer after hours calls	\$35,000.00	yearly	Y	4%
Grants, Donations	events, donors, grants	\$260,000.00	yearly	?	28%
Trainings	ASIST, safeTALK, Mental Health	\$25,000.00	yearly	Y	3%
Disasters	assist during disasters	\$25,000.00	yearly	Y	3%
TOTAL		\$880,000.00			

As you look at our budget you will see the yellow highlighted items are funding sources we are unsure about in the future. We are meeting with United Way of Cass-Clay this Friday for our newest request. We have been heavily supported by them, since the beginning of time. But as they go through change in their mission and vision, I am nervous about what the future holds for FirstLink. Currently we receive \$170,000/year from them. Also every year it is a struggle to get other grants, and donations to fill the gaps. We hold two special events every year. Our Annual Breakfast is in May, and a Silent Auction in August. We hope over time they continue to grow, but both are still fairly new.

The gold funding sources are from various North Dakota state departments. Some of these are fairly secure. While others, like the NDDDES Special Needs Registry, I am concerned about.

Why should the state invest in FirstLink?

North Dakota's 2-1-1 statewide service is in jeopardy without state funding. 2-1-1 is a free, easy to remember three digit phone number that is available 24/7 to the ENTIRE state of North Dakota. Now is the time to invest in FirstLink. This will ensure all citizens have the ability to talk with a nonjudgmental call specialist who can provide information on services available to them. FirstLink is also connected to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. All FirstLink staff

are trained in suicide intervention skills. FirstLink is the only call center in the state of North Dakota which takes calls on this designated suicide lifeline. This national network assures that no call for help goes unanswered.

In 2015: FirstLink 2-1-1 deescalated hundreds of callers who were suicidal and needed a safe place to call to collaborate on a safety plan. These calls saved North Dakota law enforcement, fire departments, dispatch centers, and EMT's hundreds of hours of time. By calling FirstLink, these departments were not called to dispatch help for welfare checks or spend time deescalating citizens.

- FirstLink's 2-1-1 Helpline gives social services agencies a place for their clients to call for listening and support on evenings and weekends.
- FirstLink's 2-1-1 Helpline gave shelter and financial information to help keep citizens safe and off the streets.
- FirstLink's 2-1-1 Helpline gave out 18,279 resources.
- FirstLink's 2-1-1 Helpline gave hope to 53,748 callers who needed assistance.
- FirstLink received 1,870 calls related to suicide on all phone lines and dispatched law enforcement 69 times. These numbers show what a difference it makes to have a trained suicide intervention call specialist available to deescalate callers in need.
- FirstLink received calls from all 53 counties in North Dakota in 2015.
- FirstLink provided mental health trainings to 4,083 people in 2015. In 2016, FirstLink has a record 31 mental health trainings scheduled. We're training in schools in towns such as Rugby and Fort Totten this spring.

FirstLink also has the capability to answer for contract agencies after hours. Currently, we answer for 18 agencies after hours and provide their clients with a trained call specialist instead of a voice mail or an on-call. This is an area that we are always interested in expanding with state and local agencies.

It doesn't matter who you are or where you live, with the state support of FirstLink, all North Dakotans can get connected to the resources they need to live productive and healthy lives. Large cities, rural areas, we are there for everyone, night and day. There's something special about knowing that someone is always going to be there for you when you need them. That's what FirstLink call specialists are trained to do, offer help and hope. On your toughest day, we will be here.

FirstLink has also prepared three action items at the request of Chairman Hogan to present to this committee. We would appreciate consideration of these items in the next legislative session.

Action Item 1: FirstLink staff and Board of Directors would like to see a minimum wage for everyone answering suicide calls in North Dakota. Similar to how there is a set minimum wage for CNA's we would like to see one for our employees as well. FirstLink call specialists never know what type of situation is waiting on the other side of a phone call. Every employee goes through over 80 hours of training before they are ready to answer phone calls on their own. We are currently starting our employees at \$9.50 an hour which we feel is not adequate for trained individuals managing crisis situations every time they work. Offering the highest quality of service to every North Dakotan in need is our top priority and we think it starts with having an adequately paid staff. FirstLink has struggled to retain employees in the past because of wages and this is our solution to help prevent that. We estimate that it would cost \$43,000 a year to raise our minimum wage to \$12.50 an hour.

Action Item 2: FirstLink would like to see a marketing campaign for the 2-1-1 Helpline similar to the Suicide Lifeline Campaign currently being sponsored by the North Dakota Department of Health, along with financial support for our Suicide Lifeline. The only funding that we currently receive for answering the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) is \$1,500 a year from the NSPL network. (I attached the email that we received from them last week). We currently receive no state funds for answering NSPL, yet many organizations, including the Department of Health promote that phone line. Currently, the North Dakota Department of Human Services only wants reports for our 2-1-1 calls and not NSPL. We believe NSPL is an invaluable resource for North Dakota and we would like to see state funding for this phone line as well.

None of our current funding covers marketing costs for any of our services. FirstLink's online database has over 5,600 resources waiting to provide help to people all over North Dakota. With a marketing campaign we could help more people get connected to the resources they need.

Action Item 3: FirstLink would like to see the North Dakota Department of Human Services (NDDHS) to fund 50% of our annual budget. We believe this is the perfect time to grow our partnership with the NDDHS. Right now, we are dependent on local funders and foundations to fund our mission of connecting all North Dakotan's to the health and human services that they need. Currently the NDDHS funds about 31% of our budget with a total of \$275,000 per year and 50% of our budget would be about \$440,000 per year.

With a more stable funding source, FirstLink has additional projects that we would like to take on. FirstLink would like to improve our database by adding for profit mental health and human service providers into it. This would require at least two more database professionals working at FirstLink to input that new information. Currently we only have nonprofit health and human service organizations represented in the database. By adding for profit agencies into our database we could improve upon our value to the state. Adding additional database employees would cost

about \$35,000 each. Depending on the number of resources that would need to be added. We may need several more database specialists.

FirstLink assists people in identifying, accessing, and make effective use of community and volunteer resources 24 hours a day. We're the ***first link*** to connect people and resources.

There are additional charts for you to look at also. Chairman Hogan, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee today. If you have any questions David and I will be happy to respond.

Cindy Miller

FirstLink Executive Director

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STAFF	POSITION	TRAINER ACCREDITATIONS THEY HOLD
all answer helplines	Executive Director	Master ASIST trainer, and safeTalk trainer
10 FT	Call Center Director	open position
	Director of Program Development	safeTALK trainer
	Training and Education Coordinator	ASIST, safeTALK, MHFA for adult and youth
	Follow Up Call Coordinator/PT	Youth Mental Health First Aid trainer
	2 Database Specialists	ASIST trainer
	2 FT overnight staff	
	Program Development Specialist	safeTALK and Youth Mental Health First Aid trainer
	Lead Call Specialist	
10 PT	Call Specialists	
	Administrative Assistant	safeTALK trainer
Personnel Costs	78%	
Operating Costs	22%	

Suicide Talk:

This training focuses on the question “Should we talk about suicide?” Session members can discover beliefs about suicide in their communities and in themselves. (90 minutes - half day)

safeTALK:

Participants will learn to apply the 4-step TALK process to connect a person with thoughts of suicide to a trained caregiver. (4 hours)

ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training):

ASIST enhances skills to intervene when a person is at risk of suicide by teaching an intervention model called the Pathway to Assisting Life. (2 full days)

MHFA (Mental Health First Aid):

MHFA is an interactive course that teaches you how to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. (8 hours)

YMHFA (Youth Mental Health First Aid):

YMHFA is an interactive course that teaches how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. (8 hours)

Community Resources:

Describes the variety of local resources that are available in the community and how to access the information 24-hours a day. (1 hour)

Active Listening:

Focuses on the transferrable skill of active listening. This topic can be a general topic or be tailored to a current need in your workplace. (1 hour)

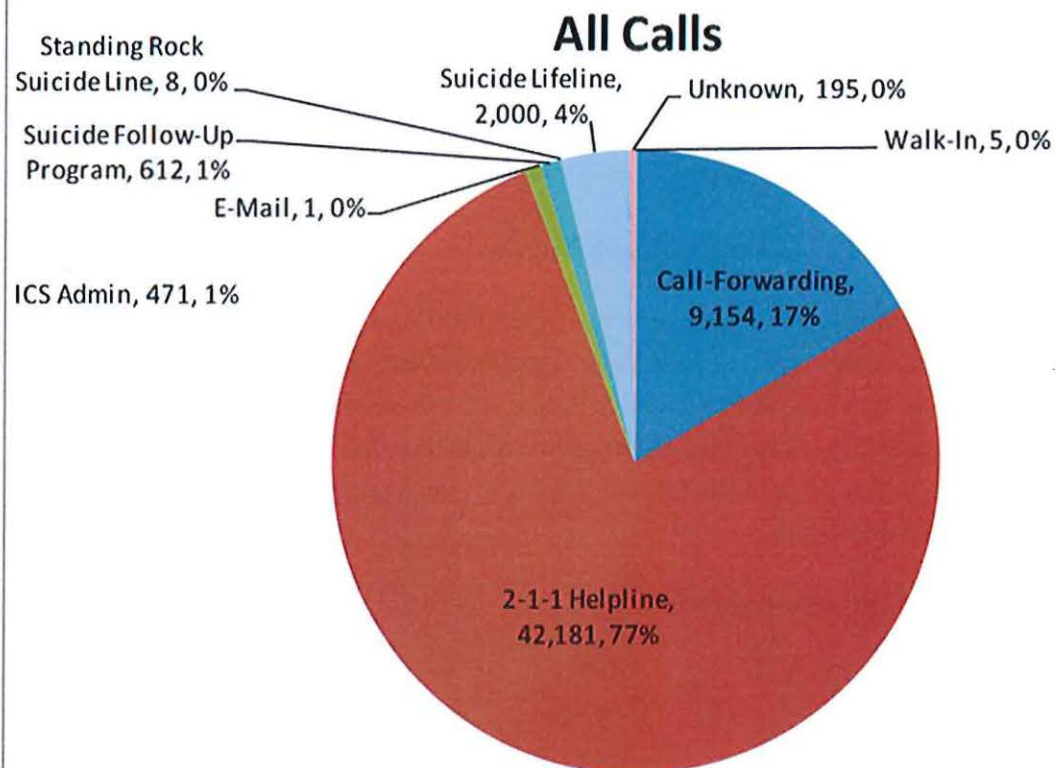
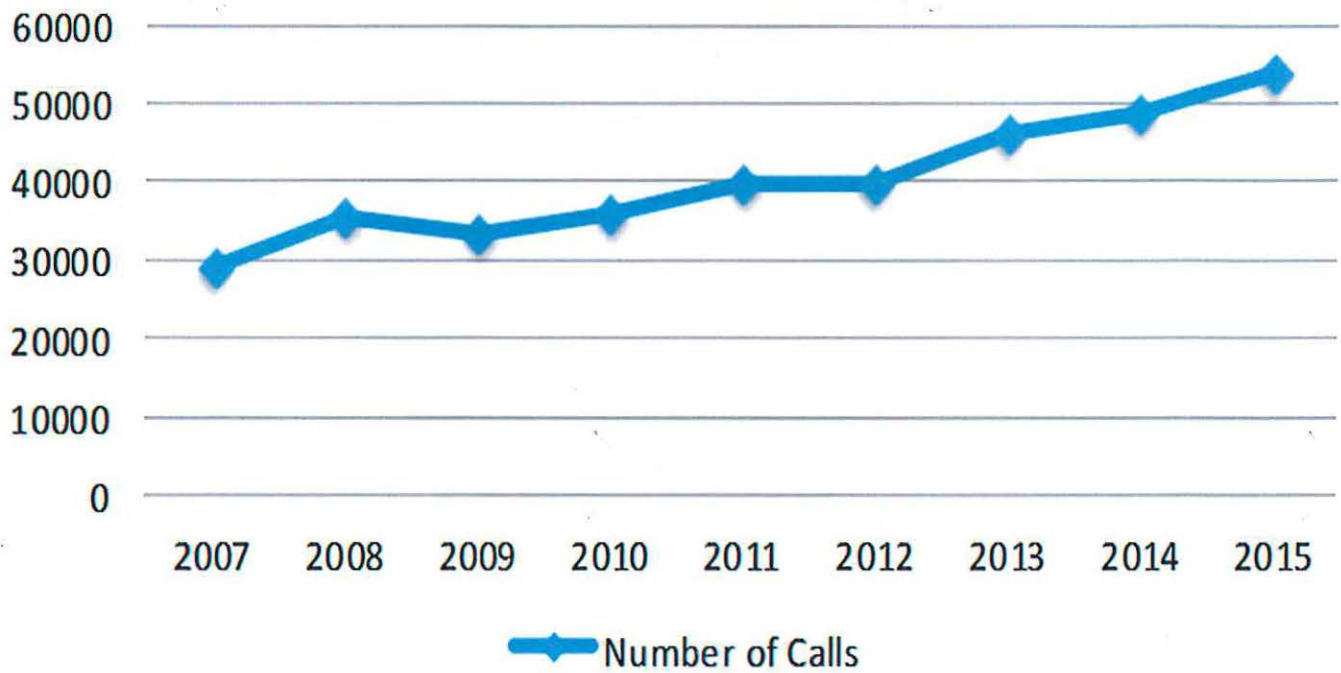
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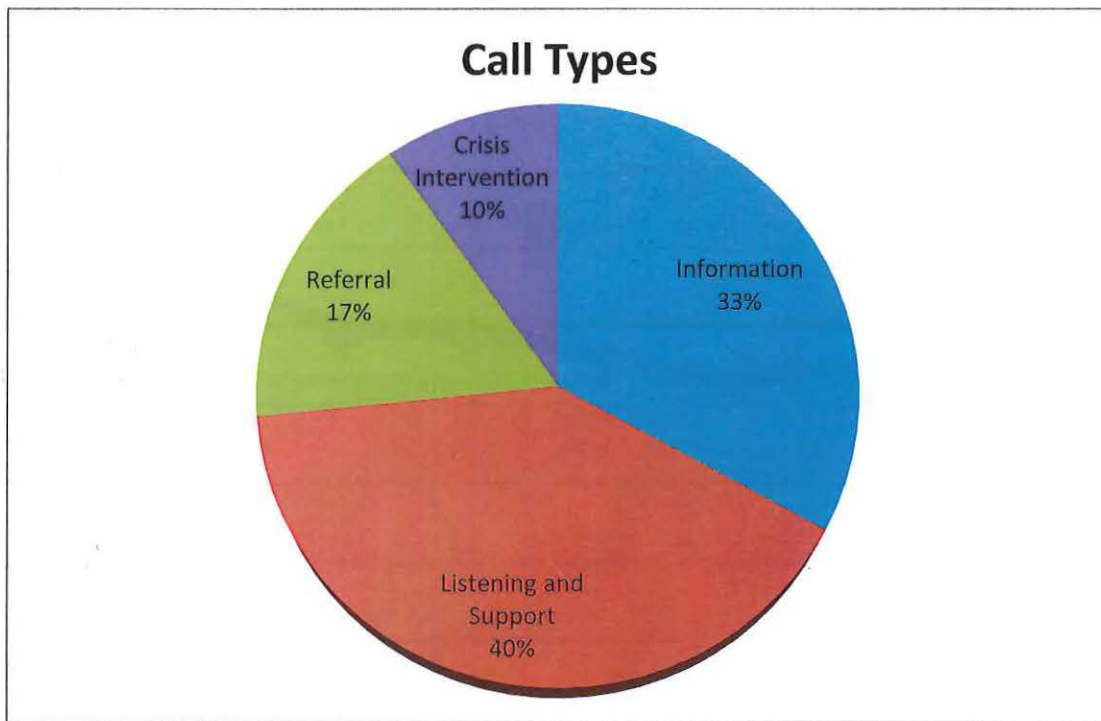
Businesses may be challenged by requests from people asking for support beyond the services provided. Common requests for this presentation have been from businesses who are receiving multiple interactions from callers with mental illness. (1 hour)

Resilience and Self-Care:

Highlights 5 main things every employee can do to develop and grow resilience, develop a self-care plan and avoid burnout. (1 hour)

Total Number of Calls by Year





Top Met Needs

FirstLink answers phone calls 24 hours a day from people in a myriad of different situations. One thing that we are able to do with our data is see patterns in what needs exist in our community. Below are the three top needs that FirstLink call specialists were able to help people find resources for in 2015. We all know that anyone is at risk of becoming financially vulnerable simply by losing a job or facing an unexpected health crisis. FirstLink has over 5,600 resources in our database to help people when they don't know where else to turn.

- Rent Payment Assistance
- Food Pantries
- Electric Service Payment Assistance

Top Unmet Needs

FirstLink also has key insight into what needs are not being fully met in the community. In the 53,748 phone calls that FirstLink took last year there were unfortunately some situations where a resource wasn't known / available to help the caller. Some of the reasons for this include financial assistance isn't currently available, no program exists to meet the need, caller is ineligible for the services, caller refuses the referral, or for a variety of other reasons. Our top three unmet needs for 2015 are below.

- Telephone Service Payment Assistance
- Gas money
- Rent Payment Assistance

Cindy Miller

From: Shari Sinwelski <SSinwelski@mhaofnyc.org>
Sent: Friday, March 04, 2016 9:09 AM
Cc: LifelineTeam
Subject: Important Information Regarding Lifeline Stipends
Attachments: Member Notification of New Stipends Policy Revised 2016.pdf

Importance: High

Dear Crisis Center Staff,

As you have probably heard, Link 2 Health Solutions (L2HS) has recently begun a new grant cycle to administer the SAMSHA funded Lifeline grant. We have used the new grant cycle as an opportunity to re-evaluate our structure for dispersing stipends to our network centers. Please see the attached document regarding our new stipend structure. As always, thanks for all you do to support the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline!

Shari

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To learn more about MHA-NYC's 2016 Gala, "*The Many Faces of Mental Health*," [click here](#).

Hello Crisis Centers,

As we are under a new grant cycle, we will be making some changes with regards to our annual stipends policy. We have made revisions to the stipends payment structure after receiving feedback from many crisis centers that the old stipends policy was confusing and demanding. Hopefully, you will be more pleased with the improved stipends structure. The next stipends to be paid will be provided only to currently active centers and will be based on this past fiscal year (10/1/2014 to 09/30/2015). Invoices will be sent out in March and will be due back at the end of the month. Payments will be distributed in May.

Lifeline network crisis centers will receive a flat rate stipend of \$1500 per year. In past years, crisis centers would receive \$2500 if they had been re-accredited in the past fiscal year. Going forward, each crisis center will get \$1500 per year. If you plan on using the stipend for accreditation purposes, please budget this accordingly, since you will be getting a flat rate on a yearly basis.

This stipend can be used towards any of the following costs you may incur:

- Accreditation costs
- The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) Conference
- The National Association of Crisis Organization Directors (NASCOD) conference attendance
- Crisis Center staff training
- Crisis Center infrastructure development

Centers will be asked to report which category their stipend was used for when submitting their stipend invoice. These reports will allow us to report to SAMHSA how funds are being spent.

Centers may receive additional funds, under the following circumstances:

Online Emotional Support Accreditation/Reaccreditation Stipend

Lifeline Crisis Centers that are part of the LCC network, are eligible for Online Emotional Support Accreditation/Reaccreditation stipend, for up to \$2500, for costs incurred to renew or acquire their OES accreditation. Centers will be eligible for this stipend once, during the 3 year grant cycle.

Spanish Sub-network Stipend

Lifeline Crisis Centers that are part of the Spanish Sub-network will receive an additional \$1,500 stipend for answering calls from Spanish-speaking callers.

Veteran's Amendment

Lifeline Crisis Centers that have signed the Veteran's Amendment, will receive an additional \$500. Our contract with the VCL underwent a 6-month extension, and as a result of this, the stipend amount will be half of what it has been (\$1000) in previous years. If the status of our contract changes beyond this 6 month extension, we will apprise Veteran's Amendment centers how this may affect VCL stipends going forward.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Nicole Lima, our Membership Assistant, at NLima@mhaofnyc.org or (212) 614-6390.

